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ARTICLE II.

ON THE TESAVUF, OR SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE SOFFEES.*

TRANSLATED FROM THE TURKISH OF MOHEMMEED MISSIREE,

BY JOHN P. BROWN, Esq.,
OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY AT CONSTANTINOPLE.

Presented to the Society May 21st, 1863.

NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR.

THE word صوف, *soof*, signifies in Arabic 'wool,' and Mr. Lane, in his 102d note on the 10th chapter of the Arabian Nights, says that the so-called *Soofees* derive their title either from their wearing woollen garments, or from the Greek word *οοφος*, because of their philosophical tenets. He adds, that "there is an order of Muslim darweeshes called *Soofees* 'who make profession of a more regular and more contemplative life than darweeshes in general; and many of this class have written books of spirituality, of devotion, and of contemplation, which mostly bear the title of 'Tasowwuf,' that is, of spiritual life.' . . . The Sunnee Soofees are in a great degree mystical and latitudinarian; but not so much so as the Soofees of the Persian sect."

In all the *tekkehs*, or convents, of the various Dervish sects which I have visited, the members sit on sheep-skins, called *pastakees*. Many also wear white felt caps made of wool, and even their cloaks are of an uncolored stuff of the same material.

The Order of the *Bektashees*, which was intimately connected with the *Yanitcherees*, wear white felt caps, and believe in the *tenassuh*, a system of metempsychosis.

* In a letter accompanying this paper, Mr. Brown protests against any alteration of his transcriptions of Arabic and Persian words, and we accordingly allow his orthography to stand unchanged, merely making it occasionally more consistent with itself. It appears to be controlled by Turkish euphony.—COMM. OF PUBL.

TRANSLATION.

A few remarks on the subject of the *tesavuf* (lit., profession of Soffeeism, or spiritual life), by the learned and pious Mohomed Missiree—may his precious grave be blessed!

In the name of the Clement and Merciful God.

Praise be to the Lord of the Universe (lit., the present and future world). Prayers and Peace [from his people] be upon our *Sayd* (Lord) Mohomed [the Prophet], and Ali [his cousin and son-in-law], and all other prophets, and the family and *Ashabs* (Companions) of Mohomed.

[*Question.*]—Should any person ask what is the beginning of the *tesavuf*, the answer is:

[*Answer.*]—Faith, which has six columns, to wit: “The Existence of God,” “His Unity,” “the Angels,” “the Prophets,” “the Day of Resurrection,” and “Good and Evil through His Predestination”—all of which are to be spoken with the tongue, and acknowledged with the heart.

[*Q.*]—What is the conclusion and end of the *tesavuf*?

[*A.*]—It is the pronouncing with the tongue of faith the six preceding columns, and the confirming of them with the heart, as was said by Junaydee, in answer to an interrogation on the subject of the end of the *tesavuf*.

[*Q.*]—What is the distinction between the *soffa* (lit., the clarified) and common people?

[*A.*]—The knowledge [which is the foundation] of the faith of the latter is only an imitation of these six columns, whilst the faith of the *soffa* is the true, as is shown by the evidences of the *ulema i uzama* (doctors of the sects).

[*Q.*]—In what does this imitation consist?

[*A.*]—This imitation is what has been learned from their fathers, the *imaams* (preachers) of the quarters in which they live, or from one of the *ulema*, and so believed; but they do not know why it has become a fundamental rule to believe in these Columns of Faith, nor how salvation is obtained thereby. It is not known that, whilst walking in the public streets, one has found a jewel which many sovereigns sought after unsuccessfully—conquering the world from one end to the other, and finding every thing else but it. He who has found it, has found a light brighter than the sun, when it obscures the lesser lustre of the moon, and found an alchemy which converts copper of a thousand years old into pure gold. The finder, however, knows not its real value, and considers it only as a false jewel, which its possessor, if thirsty, might give away for a drink of water.

[*Q.*]—What is the proof of faith?

[A.]—The proof consists in a search made for the origin of each of the six columns above named, and one's arrival at the truth (*hakkikat*). The *ilm i tarikat* (science of the sects) is the distinctive path existing between a *taklid* village and a *taklid* city [i. e. only leads from one authority to another]. Many persons follow on that pathway for ten, others for twenty, others thirty, others forty years, wandering away from the truth, and entering each upon a different road of error. Some become *Ehlee Jebree* (persons who believe that God compels each action of man, and leaves no room for free will); some become *Ehlee Kaderee* (persons who hold that man has power to do good and evil); others are *Ehlee Mutazellee*; some again become *Mujessemmees* (Anthropomorphists); and others, *Mushebbahees* (those who define the appearance of God, by portraits, or otherwise). There are, in all, seventy-three ways or sects; each one following one of these wanders off, without ever arriving at the city of the true faith; only one of these seventy-three parties is in the right, called the *Firkaii Najieh* (Party of Salvation), and it is those alone who follow this way that reach the proper goal. Through their perfect subjection to the directions of the blessed Prophet, these know the real value of the jewel found by them. Their faith is manifest; and whilst proceeding, as it were, with a lamp, they have reached the sun. Though at first only imitators, they have finally found the truth. After finding the true faith, they turn their attention to the imitation (or semblance), and familiarize themselves with its interior. They find that the *tarikat* (paths of the Dervishes) and the *sheryat* (laws of Islam) are coincident. They have as yet only received sufficient inspiration from God to enable them to see the truth, which is hidden from those who still wander in the path of imitation. Comparing the two with each other, they consider them as being like the soul and the body, according to the words of the blessed Prophet: “Whoever is deficient in one of his faculties, is deficient in one of his parts,” from which it is clear that whoever is deficient in the *sheryat* cannot be perfect in the *hakkikat*.

[Q.]—In matters of faith, and forms of worship, to what sect are the *soffa* attached?

[A.]—Most of them are of the Muslim faith, and of the sect of the *Ehlee Sunneh* (those who observe the traditional precepts of the blessed Prophet), and accept the *jemdat* (prescribed forms of public prayer), according to the *mezheb* (creed) of the celebrated Sheikh Abu Mansur Matureedee. Most of the Arabs are of the creed of the Sheikh Abul Hassan el Esharee, and are *Ehlee Sunneh*, and accept the *jemdat*, as understood and practised in conformity with one or other of the four Rites, adopted in the country to which they belong (i. e., either the *Haniffee*, *Hanballee*, *Sháfee*, or *Malekee*). For instance, those of

the country of Room are *Haniffees*, so called from Abu Hanifeh, who derived his articles of faith from the Koran and the *hadisat* (traditional sayings) of the blessed Prophet; those in Arabia, Egypt, and Aleppo, as well as in the two holy cities, are *Shâfees*; all the people of Tunis and Morocco, and as far as Andalusia, as well as some in Arabia, are *Malekees*; most of the people of Bagdad, Iraak, and a part of Arabia, with some of the inhabitants of the holy cities, follow the Hanballee Imaam. There are some differences between these, but only such as refer to forms of worship; as regards dogmas they all agree. The blessed Prophet designated those who observe the *sunneh* and *jemâat* by the title of *Ehlee Vejah* (the Saved), and these four are all of this kind. All the *soffa* belong to the *Ehlee Vejah*. It is a point of belief among the *soffa* that it is not for every one who is of the *Ehlee Allah*, or a *keramat sahibee* (i. e., either a believer in the Divinity, or particularly gifted by the Divinity), to attain to the character of sanctity belonging to the four great doctors of the holy law, much less to that of one of the *Ehlee Kuzeen* (the Twelve *Imaams*). The only means of arriving at their degrees of perfection would be to follow their creed until one surpassed it, and then to establish, by God's sanction, a new one superior to theirs—which, as yet, no one has ever been able to do.

[Q.]—When Bayazid el Bestamee was asked of what sect he was, he replied: I am of the sect of Allah. What did he mean by this answer?

[A.]—All of the sects of Allah are those just mentioned. They are called [for example] the sects of the Greater Imaam (Numan ibn Sabit el Kuffee) and of the Shâfee Imaam, but are, in reality, sects of Allah; and so Bayazid spoke truly when he said he was of His sect.

[Q.]—Most of the *Soffees*, in their *kassidehs*, use certain words which we hear and understand as showing that they were of the *Ehlee Tenassuh* (Metempsychosians). They say: I am sometimes Lot, sometimes Rayu, sometimes a vegetable, sometimes an animal, at other times a man. What does this mean?

[A.]—Brother! the blessed Prophet has said: “My people, in the eternal life, will rise up in companies”—that is, some as monkeys, others as hogs, or in other forms—as is written in a verse of the Koran (ch. 78, v. 18) which has been commented on by Kazee Beyzavee (this commentator cites a tradition to the effect that, at the resurrection, men will rise up in the form of those animals whose chief characteristics resemble their own ruling passions of life: the greedy, avaricious man, as a hog; the angry, passionate man, as a camel; the tale-bearer, or mischief-maker, as a monkey); because, though these men, while in this life, bore the human form externally, they were, inter-

nally, nothing different from the animals whose characters are in common with their own. The resemblance is not manifest during one's life, but becomes so in the other existence, after the resurrection. Let us avoid such traits; repentance before death will free any one from these evils. The blessed Prophet said with regard to this: "Sleep is the brother of Death" (النوم أخ الموت). The dying man sees himself in his true character, and so knows whether or not he is, by repentance, freed from his ruling passion of life. In like manner, he will see himself during his slumbers, still following in the path of his passion. For instance, the money-calculator, in sleep, sees himself engaged in his all-absorbing occupation; and this fact is a warning from God, not to allow himself to be absorbed in any animal passion, or degrading occupation. It is only by prayerful repentance that any one can hope to see himself, in his sleep, delivered from his ruling carnal passion, and restored to his proper human, intellectual form. If, in your slumbers, you see a monkey, consider it as a warning to abandon, or abstain from, the passion of mischief; if a hog, cease to seize upon the goods of others; and so on. Go and give yourself up to an upright *murshid* (spiritual guide), who will, through his prayers, show you, in your slumbers, the evil parts of your character, until, one by one, they have passed away, and have been replaced by good ones—all through the power of the name of God, whom he will instruct you to invoke: at length you will only see, in your slumbers, the forms of holy and pious men, in testimony of that degree of piety to which you will have attained.

This is what is meant by that expression of certain poets, referring to one's condition previous to the act of repentance, when the writer says: I am sometimes an animal, sometimes a vegetable, sometimes a man; and the same may be said by the *Soffees*, in application to themselves, of any other part of creation, for man is called the *akher i meyjudat* (the climax of beings): in him are comprised all the characteristics of creation. Many mystical books have been written on this subject, all showing that man is the *nuhai kubra* (the larger part), and the world, the *nuhai sogra* (the smaller part), of God's creation. The human frame is said to comprise all the other parts of creation; and the heart* of man is supposed to be even more comprehensive than the rainbow, because, when the eyes are closed, the mental capacity can take in the whole of a vast city: though not seen by the eyes, it is seen by the capacious nature of the heart. Among such books is the *Haooz el Hayat* (Well of Life), which says that, if a man closes his eyes, ears, and nostrils, he

* Orientals consider the heart as the seat of mental capacity; and the liver, of the affections.—T.R.

cannot take cold; that the right nostril is called the sun, and the left the moon; that from the former he breathes heat, and from the latter cold air. There is also a treatise entitled *Nuskha'ī Kubra*, wholly on the subject of the superiority of man, which is one of the favorite works of the *Soffees*.

[Q.]—Explain the distinctive opinions (*mezhebs*) of believers in the *tenassuh*, and of the *Soffees*.

[A.]—We say that this system of metempsychosis has nothing to do with the *barzakh* (a name given to the intermediate period between death and the resurrection, mentioned in the 23d chapter of the Koran, 102d verse, in which departed souls receive neither rewards nor punishments: here, however, it means only a state of total indifference to all future life, into which some men fall in consequence of the vicious nature of their lives, or their spiritual demoralization). It is believed to be operative in eternity, or in the future state; it is declared, that it does not exist in the present life. For example, it is said that some men take the character of certain animals, not their forms, and that, when they die, their souls enter the bodies of such animals as they already resembled in character, and so, by natural propagation, they become the animals themselves, visible to the eye, and never again really die, or cease to exist in this world. In this manner, mankind leave the human form, and become, in turn, various animals, either through natural propagation, or by one animal devouring another, perpetually. Such is the belief of the Metempsychosians, and it is wholly inconsistent with the true faith. On this point Omar ibin el Farid has said: “He who believes in transformation and transmigration stands in need of God's healing—keep thyself far removed from his belief!”

(وَمَنْ قَبِيلٌ بِالنَّسْخَ وَالْمَسْخَ وَاقِعٌ بِهِ أَبْرَاءٌ وَكُنْ عَمَّا يَرَاهُ بَعْزَلَةٌ)

O brother, keep far from such a belief, and have no connection with it. Of the seventy-two erring sects, before alluded to, this is the worst. God preserve us, in this life and the one to come, from participating with, or even beholding, such sectaries!

[Q.]—These persons regard certain things as legally proper, which are forbidden. For instance, they command the use of wine, wine-shops, the wine-cup, sweethearts; they speak of the curls of their mistresses, the moles on their faces, cheeks, etc.; and compare the furrows on their brows to verses of the Koran. What does this mean?

[A.]—Just as these *Soffees* leave the true faith for its semblance, so they also exchange the external features of all things for the internal (the corporeal for the spiritual), and give an imaginary signification to outward forms. They behold objects of a precious nature in their natural character, and for this reason

the greater part of their words have a spiritual and visionary meaning. For instance, when, like Hafiz, they mention wine, they mean a knowledge of God, which, extensively considered, is the love of God. Wine, viewed extensively, is also love: love and affection are here the same thing. The wine-shop, with them, means the *murshid i kiamil* (spiritual director), for his heart is said to be the depository of the love of God; the wine-cup is the *telkin* (the pronunciation of the name of God, in a declaration of faith, as: There is no God but Allah), or it signifies the words which flow from the *murshid's* mouth respecting divine knowledge, and which, heard by the *sálik* (the Dervish, or one who pursues the true path) intoxicates his soul, and divests his mind (of passions), giving him pure spiritual delight. The sweetheart means the excellent preceptor, because, when any one sees his beloved, he admires her perfect proportions, with a heart full of love: the Dervish beholds the secret knowledge of God which fills the heart of his spiritual preceptor (*murshid*), and through it receives a similar inspiration, and acquires a full perception of all that he possesses, just as the pupil learns from his master. As the lover delights in the presence of his sweetheart, so the Dervish rejoices in the company of his beloved preceptor. The sweetheart is the object of a worldly affection; but the preceptor, of a spiritual attachment. The curls, or ringlets, of the beloved are the grateful praises of the preceptor, tending to bind the affections of the Dervish-pupil; the moles on her face signify that when the pupil, at times, beholds the total absence of all worldly wants on the part of the preceptor, he also abandons all the desires of both worlds—he perhaps even goes so far as to desire nothing else in life than his preceptor; the furrows on the brow of the beloved one, which they compare to [verses of] the Koran, mean the light of the heart of the *murshid*: they are compared to verses of the Koran, because the attributes of God, in accordance with the injunction of the Prophet: “Be ye endued with divine qualities” (تَخْلُقُوا بِخُلُقِ اللَّهِ), are possessed by the sheikh (or *murshid*).*

[Q.]—The *murshid* and other Dervishes say: We see God. Is it possible for any other than the Prophet to see God?

[A.]—It is not possible. What they mean by this assertion is that they know God, that they see His power; for it is forbidden to mortal eyes to behold Him, as is declared in the Koran (ch. 6, v. 108): “No sight reaches Him: He reaches the

* During the wars between Ali and Muavieh, the latter, on being once beaten, elevated the Koran on a lance, and begged for mercy. On this being reported to Ali, he declared that he himself was the living and the speaking Koran, whilst the one raised upon the lance of his enemy was only a painted, or imitated one.

sight—the Subtle, the Knowing.” The blessed Prophet commanded: “Adore God, as thou wouldest didst thou see him; for, if thou dost not see Him, He sees thee” (عَبَدِ اللَّهِ كَانَكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّكَ بِرَاهِكَ). This permission to adore Him is a divine favor, and they say that they are God’s servants by divine favor. The blessed Ali said: “Should the veil fall from my eyes, how would God visit me in truth!” (لَوْ كَشَفَ الْعَصْنَاءِ مَا) (ازورت یقیناً). This saying confirms that no one really sees God, that even the sainted Ali never saw Him.

[Q.]—Can it possibly be erroneous to say that, by seeing the traces of any one, he may be beheld?

[A.]—One may certainly be thus seen. When any person sees the brightness of the sun, he may safely say that he has seen the sun, though indeed he has not really seen it. There is another example, namely: should you hold a mirror in your hand, you see a figure in it, and you may therefore say that you see your own face, which is really an impossibility, for no one has ever seen his own face, and you have asserted what is not strictly correct.

[Q.]—Since every one sees the traces of God, as every one is able to do, how is it that the Dervishes declare that they only see Him?

[A.]—Those who make this statement do not know what they see, and have never really seen Him. A person who has eaten of a sweet and savory dish, given to him, but of which he knows not the name, seeks for it again with a longing desire after it, and thus wanders about in search of what has given him so much delight, ignorant of what it is. So are those who seek after God, without knowing Him, or what He is.

[Q.]—Some Dervishes declare: We are neither afraid of Hell, nor do we desire Heaven—a saying which must be blasphemous. How is this?

[A.]—They do not really mean that they do not fear Hell, and that they do not wish for Heaven. If they really meant this, it would be blasphemous. Their meaning is not as they express themselves; probably they wish to say: O Lord, Thou who createdst us, and madest us what we are, Thou hast not made us because we help Thy working; we are therefore in duty bound to serve Thee all the more devotedly, wholly in obedience to Thy holy will; we have no bargaining with Thee, and we do not adore Thee with the view of gaining thereby either Heaven or Hell. “God has bought the goods and persons of the Faithful, and given them Paradise in return” (ch. 9, v. 112, of the Koran), which signifies that His bounty has no bounds, His mercy no end; and thus it is that He benefits His faithful servants. They would say: Thou hast no bargaining with any

one; our devotion is from the purity of our hearts, and is for love of Thee only. Were there no Heaven, nor any Hell, it would still be our duty to adore Thee. To Thee belongs the perfect right to put us either in Heaven or in Hell, and may Thy commands be executed agreeably to Thy blessed will! If Thou puttest us in Heaven, it is through Thine excellence, not on account of our devotion; if Thou puttest us in Hell, it is from out of Thy great justice, and not from any arbitrary decision on Thy part; so be it forever and forever! This is the true meaning of the *Soffees*, when they say as before stated.

[Q.]—Thou saidst that there is no conflict between the *sheryat* and the *hakkikat*, and nothing in the latter inconsistent with the former; and yet these two are distinguished from one another by a something which the *Ehlee Hakkikat* (Believers in the Truth) conceal. Were there nothing conflicting, why should it be thus hidden?

[A.]—If it be concealed, it is not because there is a contrariety to the *sheryat*, but only because the thing is contrary to the human mind: its definition is subtle, and not understood by every one, for which reason the blessed Prophet said: “Speak to men according to their mental capacities” (لَمْ يَأْتِ النَّاسُ عَلَى قَدْرِ عَقْلِهِمْ), for, if you speak all things to all men, some cannot understand you, and so fall into error. The *Soffees* therefore hide some things conformably with this precept.

[Q.]—Should any one not know the science which is known to the *Soffees*, and still do what the *sheryat* plainly command, and be satisfied therewith, would his faith (*imān*) and *islam* be less than that of the *Soffees*?

[A.]—No. He would not be inferior to the *Soffees*; his faith and *islam* would be equal even to that of the prophets, because faith and *islam* are a jewel which admits of no division or separation into parts, and can neither be increased nor diminished, just as the portion of the sun enjoyed by a sovereign and by a *fakir* is the same, or as the limbs of the poor and the rich are equal in number: just as the members of the body of the sovereign and the subject are precisely alike, so is the faith of the *Ehlee Islam* the same in all and common to all, neither greater nor less in any case.

[Q.]—Some men are prophets, saints, pure ones, and others *fassiks* (who know God, but perform none of His commands); what difference is there among them?

[A.]—The difference lies in their *marifeh* (knowledge of spiritual things), but in the matter of faith they are all equal: just as, in the case of the sovereign and the subject, their limbs are all equal, while they differ in their dress, power and office. As to the humanity of men, that depends upon their dress of knowledge, and their spiritual power; in these only are they men, and

not simply animals. The character of the sovereign does not depend upon his humanity, which is the same as that of all other men, but upon his office and rank.

NOTE BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

It may not be amiss for us to indicate some bearings of this communication upon one of the later publications, touching the same subject, which have preceded it.

1. Schmölders, in his *Essai sur les Écoles Philos. chez les Arabes*, lays stress upon the point that Sūfism is neither a philosophical system nor the creed of a religious sect, but simply a way of living: this view is confirmed, not only by the express statements of our Turkish author, but also by the tone of his answers to supposed inquiries—showing that, while not, himself, one of the Sūfis, he yet regarded them as, in general, fellow-believers.

2. The same writer, however, recognizes one exception to the foregoing, namely, in the profession of belief in transmigration by a limited number among the Sūfis, chiefly in Persia, with whom the community at large are often, as he says, erroneously confounded: this also is illustrated by Mr. Brown's paper.

We add a few words respecting the origin of Sūfism, and those quoted from one of the earliest books on the subject, Tholuck's *Ssufismus* (1821), which are still instructive and interesting. After remarking upon traces of the elements of this manner of religious life in the first century of the Hijrah, Tholuck places the origin of Sūfism, properly so called, in the following century, and says: "Hoc eodem saeculo, dum omnia saevo tumultu miscebantur, et dubitatio de religionis veritate multorum implebat simulatque conturbabat animos, mysticismus, ut fieri solet et alias, magis magisque in constantiorum pectora sese insinuans permagnam patronum copiam nactus est, longe lateque ramis suis emissis. Surrexerant in ordinibus diversissimis viri conscientiae impetu concitati, qui reicta priori vitae consuetudine ad id solum negotium inumberent, ut fervidum divinarum rerum atque religiositatis studium civibus suis commendarent, nec praecepsit tantum sed vitae exemplo, quid amor posset divinus, ostenderent" (pp. 55-6).

This communication is understood to be an extract from an extended work on Muslim mysticism, on which Mr. Brown has been engaged for some years, and which is now almost finished.